

HEMIPODIUS MELANOGASTER: Gault.



HEMIPODIUS MELANOGASTER, *Gould.*

Black-breasted Hemipode.

Hemipodius melanogaster, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part V. p. 7.

AUSTRALIA may be said to constitute the great nursery of the Hemipodes ; for no other country is inhabited by so many species, and certainly there is not a finer one in existence than the subject of the present Plate. Future research will doubtless furnish others, and in all probability the interior, at present a terra incognita, will not be wanting in species of a form peculiarly adapted to inhabit the sterile kind of country of which it is supposed to consist.

I regret that, never having seen this species in a state of nature, I am unable to render any account of its habits and economy. It is a native of the eastern portion of Australia ; specimens in my own collection, and in those of the Zoological Society and King's College, London, were all procured at Moreton Bay. Judging from analogy, I presume that the sexes present little or no difference in their markings ; until we are enabled to resort to dissection, we cannot with certainty ascertain whether the same disparity in the size of the sexes occurs in this species as in the other members of the genus ; in all probability the female will be found to exceed the male.

Crown of the head, ear-coverts, throat and centre of the abdomen black ; over each eye extends a line of feathers having each a small white spot at the tip ; this line extends to the nape, which part is also thickly spotted with white on a black and chestnut-coloured ground ; feathers on the sides of the chest and flanks black, having a large crescent-shaped marking of white near the tip ; mantle and upper part of the back rich chestnut brown, each feather having a spot of white and a stripe of black on each side, and barred with black at or near the tip ; shoulders, greater and lesser wing-coverts rufous brown, each feather having a white spot surrounded with a black line ; primaries dark brown ; thighs and upper and under tail-coverts brown, freckled and crossed with black ; bill light brown ; feet flesh-colour.

The Plate represents the bird of the natural size.